Novena

[Mt 9:14-15](https://bible.usccb.org/bible/matthew/9?14%20)

The disciples of John approached Jesus and said,

“Why do we and the Pharisees fast much,

but your disciples do not fast?”

Jesus answered them, “Can the wedding guests mourn

as long as the bridegroom is with them?

The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them,

and then they will fast.”

Hello, I am Lisa Chambers, and I appreciate the opportunity to stand up here and be part of this tradition and meaningful prayer.

Today’s Gospel is short and sweet. They knew I needed the simple one :) If you need a refresher, the disciples of John asked Jesus why his disciples don’t fast and Jesus reponds, “Can the wedding guest mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.”

Two pieces come to mind for me as I let that Gospel resonate and think about the slow work of God in our lives…

First, said best in the quote by the late Portland author and University of Portland legacy, Brian Doyle:

*“We’re here for a little window. And to use that time to catch and share shards of light and laughter and grace seems to me the great story.”*

Jesus reminds us to be present. We often worry and fret about the future, about things we can’t control, about the end of something…but here, Jesus reminds us not to “mourn” while the bridegroom is with them. To be present. You all know those people who, as soon as it is Saturday evening, they are already thinking about how Sunday is their last day of the weekend and Monday is almost here and they are anxious…yet, their weekend is still happening right before their eyes. Every parent knows that feeling: we don’t want our children to grow up, but it seems when they are the smallest we are busy cleaning and washing and cooking and working so hard that we forget to just stop and be…to sit in the moment with them. To look at their sweet youthful eyes and their peach soft cheeks and remember that they are just in this place, this spot, for a moment, and we should catch that shard of light. So, when my youngest is giving me the play by play from the bathroom, or when three of them are talking to me at the same time, or when I look around the dinner table for family dinner that we barely all got seated for and then I realize that my children don’t have shirts on and one of them is missing his pants…that sometimes I just need to be- just enjoy them, just eat with them, share the day and not worry about what isn’t or what is coming…to laugh about it and to capture the shards of light. With my students at school, I have to remind myself that while I want them to learn, speeding through root words and vocabulary and short stories and grading papers…to stop and look them in the eyes. To be with them in their challenges. To greet them with authenticity and a genuine interest in their life. And I am certain that my husband will see the replay of this and laugh because I am the most guilty of rushing to the finish line…to be present is a gift. I have always admired the people who so calmly walk through life, never worrying what is about to happen or what happened ten minutes ago- they are capturing a lot of light. Brian Doyle was right - that is the true gift and we are only here for such a short moment. Nothing showed us that more than COVID- trapped in our houses in the initial lockdown, anxiety, worry, fear spread through the news…and we watched families play games, go on bike rides, let go of control…I can remember thinking we are teaching remotely and I am supposed to have three children at home and teach them their schooling at the same time and one of them is a baby?! Whaaaaaat!? And then, on Easter we were going for a family bike ride, and we were on the same street as Father Craig’s childhood home when I had a bike accident. I tried to stop and help my son and threw myself over the handlebars…my family stopped their bikes and while my husband evaluated my arm with a bike between us with a 9 month old on it in a bike seat…he fainted on top of me and the baby and the bike…ha! So, then with a broken elbow, my husband on the way to the ER, teaching remotely, and facilitating school for two, and unable to carry an infant or even do my hair…I had to laugh. What I didn’t always stop to see was- the adventures we went on every afternoon because we needed to get out of the house, the curiosity in the young faces, the naivety in my young boys as they didn’t understand the realities of what was happening in our world was refreshing; I tried so hard to be in the moment, but just like for all of you- it was hard and required prayer and focus. To see the fort in the basement, made with ropes and sheets, and the nice pillows, and headlamps and lanterns as not just a mess to clean up later, but to stop in the moment and grab that shard of light, to see the fort, the adventure, and the life- not the mess. Again, as my late mother was diagnosed with a brain tumor last year…we were told 3 months- maybe. She lived four and in those months I learned exactly what Brian Doyle meant. I learned what Jesus meant. My mom relearned to walk after she was unable from a fall and a seizure. She kept living and visiting. She didn’t mourn the ending that was coming. She didn’t mourn her every setback. She had an incredible faith and seemed to model the very thing that Jesus tells us in this passage. She lived in the present. And so we all did…

Dad by day, my mom was less capable and more reliant on help, until she could no longer get out of bed or even move her arms. She still enjoyed a bite of a cookie. She still wanted to hear a cousin even when she couldn’t respond. She still wanted her friend to read to her. She still cheered for Gonzaga basketball. She still tried her crossword puzzles and watched her grandchildren play out the window. If she had focused on the end, on what she was going to miss, if she had questioned God, she would have missed the moments. She would have missed the meaning of our last Christmas together, songs from her two year old grandchildren, and our virtual Christmas Mass streamed live from St. Ignatius where resident expert pianist Joseph brought down the house with “Oh Holy Night”- with our family there, with her, helping her *live* her last days- not a dry eye in the house…living in the moment is what got us through those times and what made them beautiful. Shards of light.

The second piece…I know…I’ll hurry (everyone just looked at their watches). As we read the passage we see that Jesus is comparing his own death to a wedding. The parallels to such a joyous event seem confusing and contradictory to the solemnity and sorrow that his followers were feeling in their hearts. He reminded them that rather than focusing on the challenges and the struggles we cannot control, we can find the positive and the joy and rebirth in even the most troubling events, trusting the plan. Never discrediting the sadness or hurt, but just trusting the slow work of God, working through us…and sometimes it is sloooooooooooow. Jesus knew and trusted that there was resurrection, that his earthly time would end. I see the slow work of God in my students and sometimes it is easier to see in others than ourselves- it requires an intense amount of introspection to see it within. Two years ago, a young person in our very own community, was crossing an intersection on a bike and was run over by a truck. I don’t say this lightly- he was literally run over. The wheels of the truck not only smashed the bike he was riding, but also his entire pelvis. He sat on the pavement and screamed. He was taken to OHSU- surgeries, procedures, medications, wheelchairs, doctors appointments, physical therapy, all ensued. Now, imagine that you are in middle school…and no one ever says “wow, I just wish I could relive middle school” and you are in the middle of a pandemic, and you are doing school virtually (which can be challenging and depressing and isolating), and now you have an external fixater coming out from your bones around your hips and you can’t even go to the bathroom on your own. Middle school was hard before all of that. That same student, that same amazing and resilient human being- with a family of strength, walked- yes walked- through the doors when we returned to school and was a changed person. He verbalizes how much he grew up because of the accident. He no longer cares about some of the insignificant worries he had before and maintains a new outlook on life. He had to relearn to walk, to do daily things, to go out of the house, and to regain strength. He had to try to concentrate in online school while laying flat in his bed with metal sticking out of his body. He stands today and gives an oration about his growth, about his outlook, and about his maturity. He is not the same person. Slow work of God. Looking at his death as a wedding…the growth and rebirth. Wow. And lastly, I will leave with a summary of my own journey. I worked at the University for eleven years, all while coaching club soccer for 15 years. A former student and soccer player there, I came back after my playing career and coached. I bled purple. I left every ounce of myself on that pitch…the highs the lows and it was time to move on. It was time to leave collegiate coaching altogether- to focus on my family. I was torn in leaving. I was torn in leaving the beautiful game. It had been such a big piece of my life for so long, but I didn’t want to make it my children’s lives. I wanted to let them pursue their own passions. I walked away from the game after many years. I only continued to coach a few individuals that I had coached in club soccer since they were 10. I stepped out and didn’t look back. I was unemployed with two young children and only brief ideas about where to turn. I had my Masters in Education because I love to teach life through whatever modality allows it. I loved the way people learned and interacted. I spent years supporting youth in many capacities. I was lost. I appreciated time with my husband and children, but wasn’t sure where my calling was leading me. I wanted to learn about the psychology of people and I knew I loved community. So, I met with 33 different people in all different industries: HR, athletics, consulting, athletic apparel, sportswear, marketing, teaching, school psychology, and multipurpose tools. It was in God’s work, that I found my passion again. My child already attended St. Ignatius and I met with the administration to learn the ins and outs and about opportunities. She directed me to speak with a St. Ignatius parent in school psychology. And here I am- teaching at St. Ignatius after several years and in school to further my education as a school psychologist…to be able to give every student exactly the support they need. As my Dad has told me my entire life, “In every problem there is an opportunity” And it was through that slow work, through pouring out my heart into my previous work, and in healing and finding this community, that I found myself again. It was all of you that I found. It was the slow work of God that brought me to each of you at Mass, at school, in the hallways, that showed me purpose and life and built on my former experiences, and made me whole again. So, to trust in the slow work of God is to let go of control and see that we don’t always see the joyful wedding in the shadows of the looming darkness.

We don’t know the future, but I encourage us all to step forward being present… amidst the movement- to be still-and to collect those shards of light along the way while we trust that God is working through us.